DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 171 015 EC 115 224

AUTHOR Zucker, Stanley H.; And Others
TITLE Racial Determinants of Teachers' Perceptions of Placement of the Educable Mentally Retarded.
PUB DATE Apr 79
NOTE 10p.; Paper presented at the Annual International Convention, The Council for Exceptional Children (57th, Dallas, Texas, April 22-27, 1979, Session T-20)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Cultural Differences; Discriminatory Attitudes (Social); *Educable Mentally Handicapped; Exceptional Child Research; Mentally Handicapped; *Mexican Americans; Minority Groups; Primary Education; *Sex Differences; *Student Placement; *Teacher Attitudes

ABSTRACT

In the study involving 180 second and third grade teachers the effect of a student's sex or race on recommendations for placement in special classes for the educable mentally retarded was determined. Ss were randomly assigned to one of four groups: Group 1 received a case study depicting an Anglo-American male; Group 2 received a case study depicting an Anglo-American female; Group 3 received a case study depicting a Mexican-American male; and Group 4 received a case study depicting a Mexican-American female. It was found that regardless of the sex of the child, teachers scored special class placement more appropriate for Mexican-American children than they did for Anglo-American children. (SBH)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED171015

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF
EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Racial Determinants of Teachers' Perceptions of Placement of the Educable Mentally Retarded

Stanley H. Zucker

Alfonso G. Prieto

Robert B. Rutherford, Jr.

Arizona State University

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

CEC

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

EC 115 334

Racial Determinants of Teachers' Perceptions of
Placement of the Educable Mentally Retarded

Classification of individuals through the use of labels is a common practice in special education. This continues despite the writings of many educators pointing out the possible deleterious effects of some of these labels (Jones, 1972; Lilly, 1970: MacMillan, 1973; Mercer, 1973). Included in these deleterious effects is the sociological hypothesis that labels create expectancies which in turn may create self-fulfilling prophecies (Rosenthal & Jacobson, 1968).

While teacher expectations are ubiquitous, their effects depend upon their accuracy and upon their flexibility. Teacher expectations usually are the result of student behavior and not the cause. In the typical classroom situation the teachers' expectations will vary as a function of student differences on performance criteria. The problem, however, is that recent evidence supports the notion that teacher expectations are based on other factors than performance criteria. Factors such as labels, sex, physical appearance, race, social class, speech, and personality have been shown to result in inaccurate teacher expectations (Foster, Ysseldyke, & Reese, 1975; Jackson & Cosca, 1974; Jensen & Rosenfeld, 1974; Leacock, 1969; Palardy, 1969; Ross & Salvia, 1975; Salvia, Clark, & Ysseldyke, 1973).

Most of the studies cited above dealt with either naturally occurring or artificially induced expectations and their effect on teacher behavior. One of these studies, however, dealt with a different aspect of expectancy interactions. Ross and Salvia (1975) were interested in

whether a child's physical attractiveness would influence teacher willingness to recommend special class placement for the educable mentally retarded and teacher judgment of future school behavior. They found that teachers were more willing to place unattractive children in special classes. Also, unattractive children were rated lower in terms of future school behavior. Thus, it was concluded that the gross characteristic of physical attractiveness contributed toward biasing teacher judgment for special class placement.

The implications of this finding would seem extremely important as it may affect subsequent expectations and behaviors. The child labeled EMR due to teacher bias would then be subjected to expectational influences associated with the label. Again, depending on the attitudinal flexibility of the teacher, the student may be at a great disadvantage. Brooke (1975) discussed some of the variables which affect the teacher's flexibility. These include: the nature of the information; the face validity of the information; the teacher's regard for the validity of the tests used to provide the information; and the status or credibility of the presenter. Oftentimes these factors will constrain the amount of flexibility available to the teacher in shifting expectations.

It would seem reasonable that other gross physical characteristics of students could also influence placement decisions. The purpose of this study was to determine whether a student's sex or race biased recommendations for placement in special classes for the educable mentally retarded.

Method

Subjects

Subjects were 180 second and third-grade teachers randomly selected from the teacher population in a metropolitan area in the Southwest. The subjects' mean number of years teaching was 5.42 (sd = 2.13). Approximately 10 percent of the subjects had some coursework in special education and approximately 40 percent had completed some graduate coursework. Five percent of the subjects were Mexican-American, the remainder were white.

Materials

A fictitious case study similar to that used by Ross & Salvia (1975) was employed. The eight-year old child in this case study was depicted as functioning approximately one-year below grade level academically. The historical data provided in the fictitious report was meant to create an equivical case. That is, there was no Hard evidence to provide justification for special class placement.

Attached to the case study was a response sheet containing the following statement: "Placement in a special class for educable mentally retarded students would be appropriate for this child." This statement was followed by a seven-point Likert scale ranging from disagree very strongly (scored as 7) to agree very strongly (scored as 1).

Procedure

The subjects were randomly assigned to one of four groups. Group 1 received a case study depicting a white male; group 2 received a case study depicting a white female; group 3 received a case study depicting a Mexican-American male; group 4 received a case study depicting a

Mexican-American female. All case studies were identical except for race and sex of the child.

The directions given to the teachers were as follows: "The purpose of the following activity is to gather information regarding teacher judgments about student performance based on case study information." In addition, the following statement preceded the response sheet: "Based on the information you have just read, please respond to the following statement."

Results

The data consisted of the subjects' scored responses to the statement following the case study. A 2 X 2 (Race X Sex) analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedure was performed on the response data. Results of the ANOVA indicated a significant main effect for race ($F = 17.13$, 1/176 dF, $p < .001$). The teachers' mean response for the white children was 5.61 (SD = 1.11) while the mean response for the Mexican-American children was 4.83 (SD = 1.39). Thus, teachers scored special class placement more appropriate for Mexican-American children than they did for white children.

Neither the main effect for sex nor the race x sex interaction were significant ($p > .05$). Thus, teachers scored males and females equally on this dimension. In summary, regardless of sex of the child, teachers scored special class placement more appropriate for Mexican-American children than they did for white children.

Discussion

While most previous research on teacher expectancy has dealt with teacher-student interactions, the present study has shown that teacher

expectancy is a factor in the placement of children. The subjects in this study were second and third grade regular class teachers. Typically, these are the teachers who would refer children for special education. The finding that they were more willing to recommend Mexican-American children for special class placement than they were white children has serious implications for the referal/placement process. Children who are referred are more likely to be placed than children who are not referred. Thus, it would seem that Mexican-American children are at a disadvantage along this dimension.

There have been a number of possible explanations posited which could account for these findings. Jensen and Rosenfeld (1974) suggest that ethnocentrism may account for teachers' negative ratings of minority children. Since most of the subjects in this study were white, Cooper's (1972) finding of more favorable evaluation of one's own ethnic group seems to be a plausible explanation.

Another factor operating here may have been ethnic linkage with lower socioeconomic class and the resulting social class stereotyping. There is ample evidence to suggest that systematic bias exists in the evaluation of lower socioeconomic groups (Kehle, 1972; Miller, McLaughlin, Haddon, & Chansky, 1968; Neer, Foster, Jones, & Reynolds, 1973). Social class stereotyping may account for this phenomenon. Nurturing this stereotype, current work in mental retardation (Heber, 1970; Jensen, 1970) indicates a concentration of mild retardation in lower socio-economic groups. Neer, et al. (1973), have challenged this position providing evidence of clinician bias in diagnosing mental retardation. Since ethnic and social class cues are transmitted by both visual

(Clifford & Walster, 1973) and paralinguistic (Buck, 1968) modes and since ethnicity and social class are perceived so closely in our society it seems that it would be easy to intermix ethnic and social class cues in forming stereotypes. If this aspect is operating in the present study, then this too could account for the findings.

Finally, social dominance theory (Jensen & Rosenfeld, 1974) posits that the majority groups' beliefs about the minority group will be a function of the proportional size of the minority group to the majority group. Since the locale in which this study was conducted contains a large Mexican-American population, the utility of social dominance theory in explaining the present finding is clear.

Notwithstanding the above explanations, the fact still remains that teachers indicated special class placement was more appropriate for Mexican-American children than for white children. Evidently, the expectations that the teachers held were so strong they pervaded the identical information contained in the case studies leading to differential treatment of the students. The implication to be gleaned from this is quite clear. Decisions involving educational placement of minority group students must be reviewed in due process fashion, giving particular attention to the available evidence relating to teacher bias in educational decisions.

References

Brooke, S. B. An experimental study of teacher reinforcement patterns as expressions of differential expectancies induced by bogus labels. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Southern California, 1975.

Buck, J. The effects of Negro and white dialectal variations upon the attitudes of college students. Speech Monographs, 1968, 25, 181-186.

Clifford, M. M., & Walster, E. The effect of physical attractiveness on teacher expectations. Sociology of Education, 1973, 46, 248-258.

Cooper, J. G. Perceptions of self and others as related to ethnic group membership. Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association, Chicago, April, 1972.

Foster, G. G., Ysseldyke, J. E., & Reese, J. H. I wouldn't have seen it if I hadn't believed it. Exceptional Children, 1975, 41, 469-473.

Heber, R. Epidemiology of Mental Retardation. Springfield, Ill.: Charles C. Thomas, 1970.

Jackson, G., & Cosca, G. The inequality of educational opportunity in the Southwest: An observational study of ethnically mixed classrooms. American Educational Research Journal, 1974, 11, 219-229.

Jensen, A. R. A theory of primary and secondary familial mental retardation. In N. R. Ellis (Ed.) International review of research in mental retardation. New York: Academic Press, 1970.

Jensen, M., & Rosenfeld, L. B. Influence of mode of presentation, ethnicity, and social class on teachers evaluations of students. Journal of Educational Psychology, 1974, 66, 540-547.

Jones, R. L. Labels and stigma in special education. Exceptional Children, 1972, 38, 553-564.

Kehle, J. T. Effect of the student's physical attractiveness, sex, race, intelligence, and socioeconomic status on teachers' expectations for the student's personality and academic performance. Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Kentucky, 1972.

Leacock, E. Teaching and learning in city schools. New York: Basic Books, 1969.

Lilly, S. Special education: Teapot in a tempest. Exceptional Children, 1970, 37, 43-48.

MacMillan, D. L. Issues and trends in special education Mental Retardation, 1973, 11, 3-8.

Mercer, J. R. Labeling the mentally retarded. Berkeley: University of California, 1973.

Miller, C. K., McLaughlin, J. A., Haddon, J., & Chansky, N. M. Socioeconomic class and teacher bias. Psychological Reports, 1968, 23, 806.

Neer, W. L., Foster, D. A., Jones, J. G., & Reynolds, D. A. Socio-economic bias in the diagnosis of mental retardation. Exceptional Children, 1973, 40, 38-39.

Palardy, J. What teachers believe -- What children achieve. Elementary School Journal, 1969, 69, 370-374.

Rosenthal, R., & Jacobson, L. Pygmalion in the classroom. New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1968.

Ross, M. B., & Salvia, J. Attractiveness as a biasing factor in teacher judgments. American Journal of Mental Deficiency, 1975, 80, 96-98.

Salvia, J., Clark, G. M., & Ysseldyke, J. E. Teacher retention of stereotypes of exceptionality. Exceptional Children, 1973, 40, 651-652.